

SUMMARY OF MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

Master Planning Process

The purpose of a master plan is to serve as a guide for development of park resources. It includes an analysis of cultural, scenic, recreational, geologic, and natural resources as well as site analysis and development recommendations. It also considers public demand.

State Parks System Mission Statement

The North Carolina State Parks system exists for the enjoyment, education, health and inspiration of all our citizens and visitors. The mission of the state parks system is to conserve and protect representative examples of the natural beauty, ecological features and recreation resources of statewide significance; to provide outdoor recreation opportunities in a safe and healthy environment; and to provide environmental educational opportunities that promote stewardship of the state's natural heritage.

The state parks system tries to update each park's master plan as needed. The first master plan for South Mountains was prepared in 1979 when the park was 5,779 acres. At that time, the park encompassed the upper watershed of Jacob Fork. Subsequent acquisitions have protected the upper reaches of the Henry Fork and Clear Creek watersheds, and have resulted in a park of 17,481 acres*. The western extent of the Clear Creek watershed brings the park boundaries near US Highway 64, offering the potential to open another gateway to North Carolina's largest state park with new types of facilities.

In 2003, a 454-acre tract of land was transferred from the NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for inclusion as a part of South Mountains State Park. Through this land transfer, the two named parties made a joint commitment to create a residential environmental education center, to serve all citizens,

*As of July 1, 2007.

that will offer state-of-the-art accessibility features for special needs groups (See Appendix A).

The NC Division of Parks and Recreation (NC DPR) has revised the master plan for South Mountains State Park. For any state park, careful planning is crucial to balancing recreational demands with protection of the state's valuable natural resources. In essence, the master plan is a strategy for long-term development of facilities and recreation opportunities, and for protection of a park's natural resources.

The landscape architecture firm Swanson and Associates, P.A. of Carrboro served as the design consultant for preparation of the master plan. A part of the consultant's mission was to examine the park as a whole and evaluate opportunities and constraints for new facilities, with particular attention to be given to the Clear Creek section. Swanson and Associates, P.A. explored ways the Clear Creek section could complement existing facilities in the Jacob Fork (eastern) section of the park.

The consultant performed a thorough site inventory and analysis in order to fully understand the opportunities and constraints offered by South Mountains State Park. The consultant also analyzed usage trends for the park based on use logs kept by park staff. The *North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan 2003-2008*, was also reviewed. This plan for North Carolina prioritizes future public outdoor recreation needs in North Carolina (see Table 1) based on input from public meetings, outreach efforts and a statewide issues survey. Current uses of the park with the highest priority ranking (*rankings from 1 - highest to 9 - lowest*) combined for future demand and support for public funding include walking for pleasure, camping (tent or vehicle), picnicking, freshwater fishing, attending outdoor cultural events, visiting natural areas, bicycling for pleasure, viewing scenery, trail hiking, and use of open areas. Other park uses that fall within a lower priority ranking include primitive camping, horseback riding, and nature study.

Concurrently, the consultant worked closely with the NC Division of Parks and Recreation design and development, resource management, and trails program teams, as well as the park's superintendent and staff, to refine a program of use for the park.

Table 1: Excerpt from Priorities for Public Outdoor Recreation Funding

Activity	Future Demand	Support for Public Funding	Combined Ranking
Walking for pleasure	High	High	1
Camping, tent or vehicle	High	High	1
Picnicking	High	High	1
Beach activities	High	High	1
Fishing - freshwater	High	High	1
Attend outdoor cultural events	High	High	1
Visiting natural areas	Moderate	High	2
Use of play equipment	Moderate	High	2
Visiting zoos	Moderate	High	2
Visiting historical sites	Moderate	High	2
Bicycling for pleasure	High	Moderate	3
Swimming in pools	High	Moderate	3
Viewing scenery	Moderate	Moderate	4
Hunting	Moderate	Moderate	4
Trail hiking	Moderate	Moderate	4
Use of open areas	Moderate	Moderate	4
Target shooting	Moderate	Moderate	4
Swimming (Lakes, Rivers, Ocean)	Moderate	Moderate	4
Fishing - saltwater	Moderate	Moderate	4
Camping, primitive	Low	Moderate	7
Driving for pleasure	Moderate	Low	8
Horseback riding	Moderate	Low	8
Golf	Moderate	Low	8
Attending sports events	Moderate	Low	8
Jogging or running	Low	Low	9
Nature study	Low	Low	9
Softball and baseball	Low	Low	9
Basketball	Low	Low	9
Football	Low	Low	9
Soccer	Low	Low	9
Tennis, volleyball	Low	Low	9
Skateboarding	Low	Low	9
Sailboarding	Low	Low	9
Windsurfing	Low	Low	9
Canoeing and kayaking	Low	Low	9
Power boating	Low	Low	9
Water skiing	Low	Low	9
Downhill skiing	Low	Low	9
Cross country skiing	Low	Low	9
Other winter sports	Low	Low	9
Use of motorcycles, dirt bikes, ATV	Low	Low	9
Use of four-wheel-drive vehicles	Low	Low	9

from: NC Outdoor Recreation Plan 2003-2008

The master plan was developed in response to this program of use and the park opportunities and constraints.

The master plan is based upon the best mapping data available at the time of its preparation (See Resources and References: Digital Mapping Data). This data is not survey quality; therefore, more detailed soil, geotechnology, topographic, floodplain, wetland, ecological and other studies may be warranted in future phases of design in order to fully assess feasibility. Since planning is a dynamic process, the availability of more detailed information over time may result in a final built product that is different than that depicted in this plan.

Community Input Process

The public in general, as well as the park's neighbors, local governments, and other agencies, were invited to participate in a public meeting on May 17, 2007. The meeting took place at the Burke County Services Building, 110 N. Green Street, Entrance E, Commissioners Board Room, Morganton, NC, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

The meeting was attended by approximately 100 people, including 17 NC Division of Parks and Recreation staff and three staff from Swanson and Associates, P.A.

The meeting included a presentation of the proposed improvements, maps and renderings of the park, and staff and design consultants were available to answer questions. Comments about the plan were accepted at the meeting and afterward by letter, e-mail, telephone and numerous individual conversations. A summary of all comments received is appended to this document (see Appendix B).

Additionally, several other agencies were solicited for input on this plan, including but not limited to the NC Department of Health and Human Services, the NC State Clearinghouse, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. All input from these organizations, as well as that received during the public review process, was thoroughly evaluated and considered through this master plan process.



**South Mountains State Park Master Plan
Public Meeting, May 2007**

Resulting Capital Projects

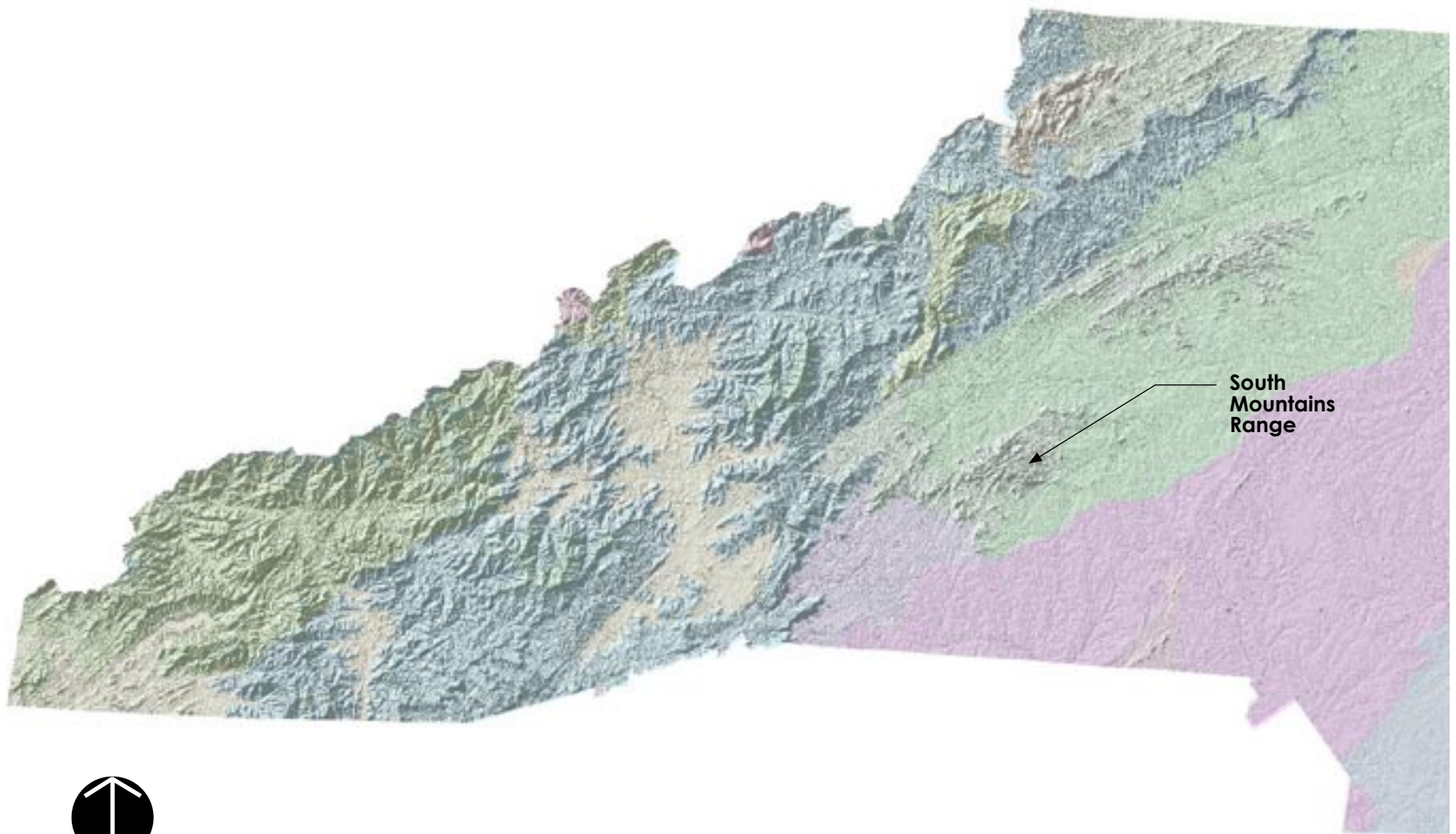
Any proposed capital project in the state parks system is individually scored and assigned priority by the park before being combined with projects for other state parks. The priorities are periodically re-evaluated. This will be the case for new infrastructure (roads, utilities, etc.), facilities, or trails at South Mountains State Park. The time frame for building new facilities will depend on how each new project is evaluated in relation to others in the state.

Generally, funding for park development comes from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, created in 1994 and supported by a portion of the state's tax on real estate deed transfers. The Parks and Recreation Authority, an appointed body, allocates money for capital projects and land acquisition after considering recommendations from the state parks system staff.

Property Acquisitions

Land acquisition objectives for South Mountains State Park include protecting water quality and natural resources, buffering these resources and visitor activities, protecting scenic views, providing land for park facilities and recreational opportunities, and improving park operations. Properties that contain or buffer rare species, natural communities, high water quality, and natural features are given the highest priority. Protecting the Outstanding Resource Waters in the Jacob Fork, Henry Fork, and Clear Creek watersheds is especially important at South Mountains State Park. Data and surveys from the NC Division of Parks and Recreation, NC Natural Heritage Program, and NC Division of Water Quality have been used to identify properties in need of protection. Where land suitable for facility development is not currently available, the master plan includes alternates dependent on additional property.

The master plan recommends acquisition of approximately 3,380 acres, bringing the total planned size of the park to 20,861 acres. The NC Division of Parks and Recreation works in conjunction with the State Property Office to acquire property from willing sellers. Each transaction with a landowner is unique and includes an independent appraisal and approval by the Joint Legislative Committee on Governmental Operations and Council of State. Funding for land acquisition generally comes from the Parks and Recreation, Natural Heritage, and/or Clean Water Management trust funds. The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund is described in more detail in the State Parks Act included in Appendix C.



Not to Scale

Figure 1: Physiographic Map of Western North Carolina